Trends in Regional Integration in West Africa: The Example of ECOWAS

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Abstract

Nations have always desired to come together either for economic survival or political solidarity and protection. Indeed, since the bounties of nature are not evenly distributed, such regional cooperation enables members share in what abounds among each other without undue antagonism or competition. The quest for regional integration in West Africa started during the colonial period. The early nationalist movements comprised French or British colonial territories an example of which is National Council of British West Africa (NCBWA). With the prospect of independence within the region, particularly after Ghana's independence in 1957, regional cooperation intensified. There was a Ghana–Guinea–Mali Union aimed at cultural, economic and political integration of the federating countries. There was also the short lived Senegambia confederation. However, it was not until 1975 that West African leaders came together to form the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS, aimed at economic integration of the region. The paper aims at interrogating the trends in regional integration in West Africa using secondary source materials, newspapers, reports and articles and extant government publications among others.

Introduction

Regional integration is vital for stronger systems of production and improved economic participation of states. And nowhere is it more crucial than in Africa. The long years of unequal trade relations with the West, spanning several centuries before, during and after the slave trade era (15th-19thc.) have tended to establish a permanently lopsided trade relations between Africa and the West. Again, the political conquest of Africa by imperial Europe typified by over half a century of colonial rule in some areas and even over three centuries in the case of South Africa, clearly diverted Africa's economic trajectory to suit the emerging capitalist economic model of the United States and Europe. The result is that even after more than half a century of independence, African economies are still tied to the apron strings of erstwhile colonial governments, laying the continent bare to the schemes of European neocolonialism with dire consequences for its already weak economy and fragile political landscape. These, coupled with the increasing pace of globalization and the shrinking of social, political and economic frontiers by technological advancements especially in the area of information and communication technology (ICT), leave Africa with little option than to harness its economic resources and create a formidable regional economic bloc that would guide its internal and external trade relations for maximization of its economies. As Amadu Sesay and Moshood Omotosho note, 'globalization is fraught with grave challenges and vulnerabilities especially for small, developing and weaker members of the community of states. Such challenges are better tackled collectively within the framework of a credible regional integration scheme'.[1]

After independence, it became clear to the emerging African nations that political emancipation would only be consolidated if there is corresponding effective internal control of the economy. The new nations found themselves trapped in the midst of deepening social and economic crises occasioned by colonialism and the sheer inability of the new indigenous governments to create strong and stable political and economic climates for the teeming population. The states thus had to find a way to restore stability against the emerging problems of rural poverty, unfavourable balance of trade, low technological output, rapid growth of urbanization, chronic food shortages, illiteracy, infrastructural decay, environmental pollution and other legacies of internal division. As Abass Bundu notes, 'nowhere in Africa have development strategies been successful in reversing the structural imbalances of our economies. The legitimate aspirations of African people for a higher standard of living have been frustrated and our national economies retain the characteristics of a colonial economy'.[2]

Established on 28 May 1975, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was borne out of these exigencies. Fifteen states in the region came together and signed the Treaty of Lagos which established the group. The founding members are Nigeria, Niger, Seirra Leone, Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Togo, Benin, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia and Burkina Faso. The Republic of Cape Verde joined two years later and Mauritania pulled out in 1999, bringing the total number of member states to fifteen. The members pledged themselves to work together to promote more trade between them, cooperate in various fields of enterprise and to aim at self-reliance in regional development.[3]

The vision was to promote cooperation and integration among member states leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to

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[11] Amadu Sesay and Moshood Omotosho, *The Politics of Regional Integration in West Africa* (Lagos: West Africa Civil Society Institute, 2011), 13.

[2] Abass Bundu, 'ECOWAS and the Future of Regional Integration in West Africa', in Real Lavergne (ed.), *Regional Integration and Cooperation in West Africa: A Multidimensional Perspective* (Canada: Africa World Press, 1997), 30.

[3] Basil Davidson, *Modern Africa: A Social and Political History* (New York: Longman Inc., 1989), 265.

raise the living standards of its peoples, maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations among member states as well as to contribute to the progress and development of the African continent. ECOWAS has undoubtedly broadened its scope especially after the Revised Treaty of 1993, and made reasonable inroads in the bid to integrate states of the region, particularly in the area of peace building and peace keeping, using its (ECOMOG) machinery. Its challenges which include multiplicity of regional economic groupings, economic hindrances, low volume of intra-regional trade and bottlenecks in border-crossing en-route member states, however, appear to outweigh the progress made so far. The result is that the much needed regional integration and borderless economic community envisaged by ECOWAS for the region, remains elusive.

This paper examines some of the trends in regional integration in West Africa, using ECOWAS as a model example. It assesses some of the strengths and weaknesses of the union so as to determine how far the ECOWAS agenda have been accomplished. The idea is to proffer more tenable solutions to the many problems bedeviling the regional body. The paper concludes by stating that regional integration is vital for improved economic prospects of West Africa and advocates increased, consistent harmonization of policies of member states to promote stronger unity and economic development in the region.

Imperatives for Regional Integration in West Africa

West Africa is in need. It is a region lavishly endowed with much of nature's vital minerals – crude oil, gold, silver, diamond, uranium, lead, zinc, *et cetera*, but chronically impoverished, with over 70% of its population living below the poverty line. A recent United Nations survey indicates that 73% of West African states are Least Developed Countries (LDC). ECOWAS states alone account for 35% of the African LDCs, making West Africa the foremost LDC region in Africa and indeed, the world in general.[4] Another study by Amadu Sesay and Moshood Omotosho shows that no less than eleven ECOWAS countries exhibit some of the lowest socio-economic development indicators, including the lowest Human Development Index ratings in the world. Only Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria appear to be excluded from the LDCs.[5]

Again, regional integration is imperative for West Africa in terms of redirecting the region's trade trajectory. West Africa's trade relation is outwardly oriented towards the developed countries of the West and more increasingly, the Asian tigers (China South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong). The region is still saddled with the problem of low technological development,

[4] ECOWAS Commission, Vision 2020 ECOWAS of the People: Towards a Democratic Community (Abuja: ECOWAS Press, 2009), 3-4.

[5] Amadu Sesay and Moshood Omotosho, 'The Politics of Regional Integration in West Africa'. WACSERIES 2 (2011), 6.

infrastructural decay and political instability. Its exports are overwhelmingly raw produce, while it depends on imports for most of its needs, including food. The end of colonialism has hardly changed this unequal trade pattern. High import costs and low returns on export leave the region with no option than to be subservient, weak and unable to exploit the complementarities of big and strong economies. Mzukuzi Qobo notes and quite correctly too, that 'while the underdevelopment of Africa has its origins in colonialism, it worsened as a result of the post-independence political mismanagement by the new leaders. They created a new form of underdevelopment as the state was used as an instrument for personal enrichment, diverting resources away from the poor'.[6] The result is that West Africa is unable to compete effectively within the global economy. Undeniably also, globalization processes have brought home forcefully to the region the reality that it is impossible for any country, including the most economically and politically powerful, to 'go it alone'. More than ever before, all countries need one another to survive in a world where states are intricately weaved together economically, politically and technologically.[7] Nations are now increasingly opening up their economies to foreign investment. West Africa cannot continue to lag behind.

Another reason why regional integration is imperative for West Africa is the size of the national markets of individual states. Nigeria may be the only exception in this regard. Otherwise, virtually all ECOWAS states have small national markets which make them uncompetitive and unattractive to the global market. As Lolette Niekerk notes, 'successful integration is believed to increase the size of the local market, enhance competition and efficient production due to economies of scale. It thus becomes a lot easier for the enlarged West African market to attract foreign investment that will benefit the region provided investors do not engage in 'tariff jumping'.[8] The effects of this would be, among other things, increased and effective intra-regional economic ties, trade promotion and a maze of valuable social, cultural, economic and political exchanges that enhance interdependence among member states to the extent that the risk of war and violent conflict among them is greatly reduced, if not eliminated

Adding also to the need for stronger economic union in West Africa is the problem of nation-building in member states. Political instability, corruption, poor cultural value system, institutional decay, religious intolerance and ethnic rivalry, among other things, have greatly marred the attempts at nation-building

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[6] Mzukuzi Qobo, *The Challenges of Regional Integration in Africa in the Context of Globalization and the Prospects for a United States of Africa* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2007), 13. See also, Okwudili Ojukwu-Enendu, 'West African Nations Rank Low on Governance Index', *Daily Sun*, 20 July 2015, 32-33.

[7] Sesay and Omotosho, 'The Politics of Regional Integration', 8.

[8] Lolette Kritzinger Van-Niekerk, 'Regional Integration: Concepts, Advantages, Disadvantages and Lessons of Experience', quoted in Sesay and Omotosho, 'The Politics of Regional Integration', 8.

in West Africa. Consequently, most of the states have failed woefully to deliver the good life to their citizens, with the result that national sovereignty is being challenged by calls for secession. A typical example is the renewed agitation of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Nigeria. It thus becomes expedient, in the light of these challenges, for the region to maintain a formidable union where policies, programmes and resources will be shared in the interest of the people. West African countries have slipped far behind in the development race and unless a more serious attempt at economic development is made, the current socio-political crises will continue to threaten the very survival of the region. Our argument is that politically challenging policy changes can be achieved through regional agreements. Regional integration thus holds considerable promise for supporting inclusive growth and sustaining development outcomes in the region. A well-structured approach to regional integration holds the promise of accelerated development through the coordinated exploitation of the region's human, natural and capital resources.[9]

By creating ECOWAS, therefore, the founding members were determined to play down the divisive historical legacies arising from the indiscriminate fragmentation of the continent during the European scramble for Africa. Given their varied colonial experiences, including three inherited languages (English, French and Portuguese) and cultures, setting up ECOWAS could be seen as a deliberate attempt to sever the umbilical cords between them and their erstwhile colonial metropoles that created powerful artificial barriers to regional solidarity.[10] The extent at which this regional project has been successful, is the focus of the present study.

Obstacles to Regional Integration in West Africa: The Case of ECOWAS

The drive to unite sixteen countries with different historical backgrounds, colonial orientations, cultures and traditions, social, economic and political systems, was never going to be smooth. But as we have argued in this paper, regional integration is imperative for West Africa, as other regions of the continent. It is the best option for the emerging states of the region in the light of the many challenges which confronted it at independence and which still do, even in greater proportions. The need to cater for the interest of the region in terms of boosting economic growth as a way of improving the overall standard of living of the teeming population was paramount. Thus, right from inception, ECOWAS has had to grapple with the uphill task of accomplishing its goals on one hand, and managing the challenges facing it on the other hand. Some of these challenges are externally motivated while others are outcomes of internal

[9] Abass Bundu, 'ECOWAS and the Future of Regional Integration in West Africa', in Real Lavergne (ed.), *Regional Integration and Cooperation in West Africa: A Multidimensional Perspective* (Canada: African Writers Press, 2000), 46.

[10] Sesay and Omotosho, 'The Politics of Regional Integration', 16.

weakness on the part of the political leadership to provide purposive governance and sustainable economic growth. Though the challenges faced by ECOWAS are multifaceted, the paper concentrates on four critical lapses which have bedeviled the fight for integration in the region. These are: multiplicity of regional economic groupings, economic hindrances, low volume of intra-regional trade and bottlenecks in border-crossing en-route member states.

- **Multiplicity of Regional Economic Groupings**

We have noted that differences in historical background, colonial experience and political orientation among member states constitute a major stumbling block to regional integration in West Africa. One of the sad outcomes of this situation is the lack of mutual trust and total commitment among members to the programmes of ECOWAS. This is exemplified by the duality and multiplicity of integration architecture in the region. The plurality of socio-economic groupings whose formations, aims and market measures are as divergent as their membership compositions has not augured well for the achievement of the ECOWAS dream of a united region. The contradictory roles of ECOWAS and other economic groups, notably, the West African Monetary Union (UEMOA) have needlessly split the West African sub-region along Anglophone and Francophone dichotomies. Institutional picture in the region is thus, characterized by the divide between the Anglophone and Francophone countries, and to some extent, the Lusophone countries.[11] The Francophone countries have shown in many ways that the ECOWAS platform is not safe enough to warrant their unalloyed support and loyalty.

One year after the ECOWAS Revised Treaty of 1993 was signed, seven Francophone countries in the region revived the failing *Communuate Economique del' Afrique de l'Ouest* (CEAO) by establishing the West African Monetary Union (UEMOA) with the aim of creating an economic union with a single market, a regional stock market and a free trade zone. Expectedly, simultaneous membership of more than one regional grouping has prevented effective execution of ECOWAS decisions by national governments. It has to be noted, however, that the attempts by Francophone countries in the region to form an economic union precedes the formation of ECOWAS. The CEAO was formed in 1973 from the erstwhile (UMOA) of 1962. Unlike other African regions the countries of Francophone West Africa have been members of regional groups since independence. Although entirely included in ECOWAS, UEMOA continues to exist as a more integrated group. UEMOA and ECOWAS both have long histories of economic integration, but it has always been deeper in UEMOA because of the monetary integration and the recent progress on trade integration in the Francophone zone. While ECOWAS has placed emphasis on policy

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[11] Sheila Page and Sanoussi Bilal, *Regional Integration in West Africa* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2001), 6.

coordination, evidence shows that it is UEMOA which has made more progress in this regard.[12] Some writers have blamed the divide on European influence, notably, the role of France in its former colonies.

The pervasive influence of Europe on existing integration projects in Africa can be traced to the colonial period when Britain and France made spirited efforts to amalgamate their respective colonial territories to enhance cost-effectiveness in their administration. In what is generally regarded as the first economic integration scheme in the region, Britain created the West African Currency Board in 1912, charged with issuing the legal tender for its four colonies of The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, to ease trade transactions. France embarked on the same integration trajectory, albeit in a more inclusive manner, by creating a monetary union using the *Communate financiere d'Afrique*, popularly known as the CFA, among its colonial territories as legal tender complete with a Central Bank in Dakar, Senegal, which acts as a clearing house. But unlike their Anglophone counterparts, the French colonies retained the CFA as legal tender after independence, making it relatively easy in theory at least, to promote trade among them. The existence of the common monetary system among the Francophone ECOWAS countries is often identified as one of the major factors that explain their reluctance to subscribe to the Community's common monetary zone[13]

This sharp disparity in focus and priority among member states resulting from different colonial legacies and allegiance are the major banes of effective regional integration in West Africa, and a major bottleneck in actualizing the ECOWAS objective of a monetary union in the region. It is not surprising, therefore, that after over forty years of its establishment ECOWAS is yet to achieve its major goal of creating a common market among the fifteen member states or significantly improving the living standards of the people. Its protocols are not often followed, especially where they may not be in the best interest of the 'rival' members. As a result, there is a glaring inability of members to create a synergy between their domestic policies and the organization's protocols and programmes to facilitate a sustainable momentum towards region-wide convergence. So far, three different economic groupings operate side by side in West Africa. The first of these was the West African Economic Community (CEAO) established in 1973 through the conversion of the much older customs and economic grouping, the *Union douaniere et economique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (UDEAO).

Disbanded on 14 March 1994, CEAO was supplanted by the West African Monetary and Economic Union (UEMOA). The ECOWAS and the Manu River Union make up the other two economic groupings. UEMOA consists of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal; Guinea,

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[12] Page and Bilal, *Regional Integration'*, 6.
[13] Sesay and Omotosho, 'The Politics of Regional Integration', 10.

Liberia and Sierra Leone form the MRU while all fifteen West African states make up ECOWAS. The multilayered problem posed by the duplication of sub-regional groupings warranted the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government in 1983, to address the issue. Consequently, a joint ECA/ECOWAS study on the rationalization of the situation was carried out and completed four years after, with its proposals adopted by the ECOWAS Authority in 1991. It was decided, among other things, that there should be a single regional economic community whose responsibility it would be to set integration policies and monitor the general process of regional integration.[14] The Resolution accomplished little, if anything at all.

Consequently, the three economic communities have continued to exist, overlapping and competing with each other, with different schemes for the elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers. As Abass Bundu rightly remarks, 'these three schemes were conceived to operate with different rules of origin, customs documents and compensation methods, so it should come as no surprise that the operation of three trade liberalization schemes in the same region has created certain difficulties and impeded the development of trade between member countries'.[15] So far, efforts to coordinate the schemes with a bid to developing a single regional system have yielded very little result.

❖ Economic Hindrances

ECOWAS has also been hampered by unfavourable economic phenomena in the region. First, is the fact that most member states are faced with financial constraints because of their poor economic status, small size and limited markets. Excercabated by poverty, unemployment, disease, lack of adequate infrastructure and technological weakness, this trend diverts the attention of national governments from long-term regional integration plans to immediate goals and short-term economic recovery plans. The unpopular 'Ghana must go' saga of 1983 under President Shehu Shagari who ordered the expulsion of about 2million immigrants from Nigeria, most of whom were Ghanaians, easily calls to mind. Similarly, in mid 2004, Liberia requested that all legal West African migrants in the country should undergo a process of re-registration while those without legal status should be deported. Again, Nigeria, in December 2016, banned the importation of cars through land borders, a measure which adversely affected importers who take advantage of the less cumbersome port tariffs in Cotonou, to import cars through land borders into Nigeria. The Nigerian

[14] Abass Bundu, 'ECOWAS and the Future of Regional Integration in West Africa', in Real Lavergne (ed.), *Regional Integration and Cooperation in West Africa: A Multidimensional Perspective* (Canada: African Writers Press, 2007), 34.
[15] Bundu, 'ECOWAS and the Future of Regional Integration', 34.

government however, insisted that the move was necessary to protect its economy.[16]

In 2013 Ghana passed a law forbidding foreigners from engaging in businesses below $100,000 in the country. Nigerians appeared to have dominated small businesses in the country and the law was perceived to work against them and perhaps, other people from neighbouring states in the ECOWAS. The measure was sharply criticized and the Nigerian government was reported to have intervened, as there were calls for retaliatory action against Ghanaians in Nigeria who were equally engaged in semi-skilled and unskilled labour in the country. Evidently, the desire for economic self-preservation has led ECOWAS member states to impose laws that militate against regional economic convergence. In most cases, therefore, national exigencies are allowed to override sub-regional interests[17] with severe consequences for the proposed unity of the region.

As has been mentioned earlier, with the exception of Nigeria, the markets of other ECOWAS states are small, making them uncompetitive and perhaps unattractive to the outside world. It should however be noted that the smallness of a country is not enough excuse for a permanent state of underdevelopment of that state. A market's optimality is determined more by its population's income levels than its size. Conceivably, a large population does not necessarily ensure scale optimality. The Pacific Rim Asian countries today offer examples of where highly competitive export oriented industrialization have been achieved with no resource advantages except for a technically proficient and hard-working labour force.[18]

Britain stands as a good example of a small island country which changed the course of its destiny by leveraging on the major resource which it had – rivers and seas, to build a world-class maritime industry that put the country in the fore-front of world trade, empire-building, imperial expansion and industrialization. Spain and Portugal which were the dominant European powers in the 16th century were later superseded by Britain because of the direction of their respective economic policies. As Christine Rider notes, both countries (Spain and Portugal) played leading roles in the voyages of discovery and Portugal for a time, successfully monopolized trade to much of the East,

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[16] Francis Ugwoke, 'The Ban on Importation of Cars through Land Borders', *Thisday*, 18 December 2016, 1,6. See also, Bayo Akomolafe, 'Tariff: Benin, Ghana Wage Economic War Against Nigeria', *New Telegraph*, 9 March 2017, 1,6.

[17] Adejumoke Afolayan, 'Circulatory Migration in West Africa: A Case Study of Ejigbo in South Western Nigeria', quoted in Adebuyusi I. Adeniran, *Regional Integration in the ECOWAS Region: Challenges and Opportunities. Backgrounder* 19 (2012), 3.

[18] A.O. Olukoshi and C.I. Obi, 'The State of Nigeria's Trade Relations with its Neighbours: Issues and Problems', in G.A. Obiozor, A.O. Olukoshi and C.I. Obi (eds.), *West African Regional Economic Integration: Nigerian Policy Perspectives for the 1990s* (Lagos: National Institute of International Affairs, 1996), 30.

replacing Venice. However, while the first phase of mercantilist doctrine is clearly linked to the overseas orientation of these two countries, the final phases owe much more to the domestic production orientation of France and England. These two countries were not major participants in the initial phase of expansion of European influence into either the New World or the Orient, but emerged into dominant positions in the 17th and 18th centuries mainly because of the policy approach of the French and British mercantile class.[19]

The mercantilist believed that for a country to be militarily and economically strong, it has to be self-sufficient so that no rival country could cut off vital imported food or military supplies. It was accepted that the political powers of the state be used to further economic interests to achieve this goal. For ECOWAS member states and Africa generally, this line of thought has not been marched with corresponding action over the years. Rather than work towards self-sufficiency, African states erroneously followed the part of import-substituting industrialization. Regional integration as conventionally applied in West Arica has gone hand in hand with in-ward looking economic strategies based on import-substituting industrialization.[20] But import-substituting industrialization is no industrialization at all, especially for emerging states in a world governed by technological innovations. At best, it makes developing countries chronically dependent on industrialized ones and perpetuates perpetual technological stagnation while stifling local ingenuity. This, in words of George Ayittey, is 'a wrong growth path'.[21] The malady had its roots in the colonial period with the Import Substitution Strategy (ISS) adopted by the British government in manufacturing and industrialization. The ISS has at least three implications.

First, is that only the final stages of production are to be done in the recipient country. The primary stage which involves the conception of a problem-solving idea, the formulation of associated theories, the production of intermediate and actual machines with which to produce intermediate and final goods, would be jettisoned. Second, foreign technology would be transferred to the recipient state to aid in the completion process. In essence, the country would either allow its latent technological skills to lie dormant or not develop any at all. Finally, the economy would be run by foreign capital and expertise. These obvious neo-colonial seedlings were not uprooted by West African governments after the colonial era. And the region has remained a dumping ground for all manner of European goods, whether or not they are suitable to the environment.

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[19] Christine Rider, *An Introduction to Economic History* (Cincinnati: South-Western Gate Publishing, 1995), 95.

[20] Ousbane Badiane, 'National Policies as Impediments to Regional Economic Integration', in Real Lavergne (ed.), *Regional Integration and Cooperation in West Africa: A Multidimensional Perspective* (Canada: African Writers Press, 2007), 75.

[21] George Ayittey, *Africa Unchained: The Blueprint for Africa's Future* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 45.

As J.O. Irukwu rightly notes, 'each society creates its institutions around some central core values'.[22]

❖ **Low Level of Intra-Regional Trade**

The volume of trade between ECOWAS member states has been painfully minimal when compared with the region's external trade contacts especially with Western Europe, North America and recently, China. This, too, is a colonial creation but one which must be eschewed, if any meaningful progress will be made in regional integration. The process of colonial conquest led to the carving up of Africa among the European imperialist powers, namely, Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal and Germany and the imposition of artificial boundaries on people who had lived and traded together for centuries. What set the colonially-imposed boundaries aside from the pre-colonial ones was their rigidity and the fact that they were constructed to serve as demarcation lines between economic territories that were to relate less to one another and more with the colonizing European countries.[23] At independence, therefore, strong umbilical economic links tied the African states to their former colonial overlords. More specifically, it concretized the integration of individual African states in varying degrees into the international capitalist system. The result is that the foreign trade of West African countries continues to show a high degree of extraversion, directed at satisfying the demands of markets outside the continent.[24]

One factor which consolidated this ugly trend is lack of complementary goods among member states. The traditional export of West African states are raw materials essentially exchanged for European finished goods. Intra-regional trade is on an all time low because virtually all the countries produce similar commodities, mainly agricultural produce. Even those endowed with crude oil, export mostly the raw crude and import refined petroleum products from the industrialized West. Another factor excercabating the problem is low technological base. This makes it near impossible for the countries to do without foreign high-tech products, some of which are not suitable to the environment.

Uka Ezenwe's 1996 study shows that West Africa's industrial and technological state was characterized by the predominance of low technology consumer goods such as cotton textile, vehicle assembly, soft drinks, soap and detergents, footwear, cement, paints, roofing sheets, beverages, etc.; relative absence of capacity for intermediate and capital goods; over-reliance on foreign inputs of the modern productive sectors including plant, machinery, equipment,

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[22] J.O. Irukwu, Nigeria at the Crossroads: A Nation in Transition (London: Witherby and Co. Ltd, 1973), v.

[23] A.O. Olukoshi and C.I. Obi, 'The State of Nigeria's Trade Relations with its Neighbours: Issues and Prospects', in G.A. Obiozor, A.O. Olukoshi and C.I. Obi (eds.), *West African Regional Economic Integration: Nigerian Policy Perspectives for the 1990s* (Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 1996), 11-12.

[24] Olukoshi and Obi, 'The State of Nigeria's Trade Relations with its Neighbours', 11.

personnel and financial capital; dearth of engineering and design capabilities as well as research and development capacity which is neither sufficiently funded nor coordinated and which is not integrated into the production system and lack of integration between agriculture and industrial production.[25] Not much has changed in the last twenty years.

Again, the low volume of trade among ECOWAS states is further fuelled by lack of a common monetary zone. Even though it is one of the critical goals of the community, creating a single currency for the region has remained elusive over the years. When fully operational, a single currency provides a wider and more attractive market for local and foreign investors because monetary transactions will be simplified and short. Sadly, ECOWAS does not at the moment, have a single currency as it is characterized by two conflicting monetary groups. On one side are eight Francophone states plus Guinea Bissau, which belong to the *Union economique et monetaire oust-africaine* (UEMOA) zone with the CFA as legal tender. On the other hand are the remaining Anglophone ECOWAS members plus Guinea, with essentially inconvertible national currencies. Liberia refuses to join either of the unions, as it uses the American dollar as legal tender side by side with its local dollar that is only convertible in the country. As a result, transacting business in the region is generally difficult, slow and expensive because transactions are done in 'hard currency', mainly the US dollar which is not easy to access, as business people would have to get it through strenuous foreign exchange bidings. As Sesay and Omotosho note, many small businesses are compelled to patronize the informal market to source for dollars and other 'hard currencies' at much higher exchange rates with all the negative consequences for their businesses and the local economies.[26] Attempts to merge the two currency zones have failed, after four postponements.

To solve this problem, the five ECOWAS countries outside the CFA zone in 2000, moved for the creation of a single currency to be known as the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ). No concrete result has been achieved, except for a number of postponements. Expectedly, the CFA zone is reluctant to give up the CFA which has served the zone relatively well for decades and which is perceived as more stable and reliable. To achieve a single currency requires the political will by member states to adhere strictly to the fiscal conditions attached to the scheme and also, their ability to incorporate national laws in the regional statutes as well as tackling the issues of fiscal policy harmonization. As Eghosa Osagie notes, and correctly too, 'a prior political commitment to integration, a willingness of members to implement agreements and protocols designed to move the integration project forward and to break the long-standing economic

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[25]Uka Ezenwe, 'Problems and Prospects of Greater Agricultural and Industrial Production in West Africa: Options for Nigeria', in G.A. Obiozor, A.O. Oludoshi and C.I. Obi (eds.), *West African Regional Economic Integration*, 30-31.

[26] Sesay and Omotosho, 'The Politics of Regional Integration', 29.

and attitudinal umbilical cord between former African protectorates and metropolitan Europe, are pre-requisites for successful monetary integration'.[27] In other words, defending sovereignty has been more important than the real commitment to growth and development which are the means to a well-managed integration process.[28]

The problem is further compounded by the fear of domination of smaller states by bigger ones. Referred to as 'the Nigerian phenomenon', the suspicions and fears of weaker member states especially those in the Francophone zone, of being dominated by Nigeria, has served to stiffen the resolve of these states to protect their socio-economic and political independence against moves considered capable of submerging them in a regional economic arrangement. Monetary integration involves greater coordination of monetary and fiscal policies among member states with a view to increasing the volume of trade. It rules out tariffs and quotas as policy instruments for regulating intra-union economic activities. Among its costs, however, is the loss of national autonomy in economic policy matters. Will member states look beyond the costs and overcome the fear of domination in the bid to form a strong, monetary union that would enhance the region's standing in Africa and the globe? How willing are they to harmonize their national fiscal policies with the demands of ECOWAS monetary agenda? Is there even the political will to spur such moves on? These questions and more, should stimulate further enquiries into the trends in regional integration in West Africa and particularly, how ECOWAS hopes to overcome its many challenges in this regard.

Bottlenecks in Border-Crossing

Bottlenecks in border-crossing due to excessive security checks *en-route* member states, cast huge doubts on the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of goods and persons within the Community. The protocol of Free Movement of People, Goods and Services was adopted in 1979 and came into force two years later. Its goal was to ostensibly facilitate one of the most vital long-term goals of ECOWAS – the creation of a common market among members. The protocol abolished visas for Community citizens travelling within the region, and encouraged free movements of goods, services and labour. Although the agreement has led to 'easy' movement within the region especially for citizens travelling by air, those travelling by road still face serious obstacles, delays and even extortion in the hands of security agencies.[29]

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[27] Eghosa Osagie, 'Towards West African Monetary Integration: Nigeria's Policy Option', in G.A. Obiozor, A.O. Olukoshi and C.I. Obi (eds.), *West African Regional Economic Integration: Nigerian Policy Perspectives for the 1990s*, 37.

[28] Mzukuzi Qobo, *The Challenges of Regional Integration in Africa in the Context of Globalization and the Prospects for a United States of Africa* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2007), 13.

[29] Sesay and Omotosho, 'The Politics of Regional Integration', 25.

In August 2011, the Director-General of the Nigerian Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA) lamented that 'the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of goods and people is being hampered by the activities of the numerous security operatives and checkpoints across our borders. The presence of the overbearing number of security personnel mounting checkpoints at member states' borders is counter-productive to the protocol.[30] Since the inception of the Community, free movement of persons and goods within the sub-region has not been fully realized. Incompatibilities in immigration and customs policies, monetary zones and official language among member states have impeded productive migration and integration within the sub-region. Migrating citizens within the ECOWAS member states continue to experience routine intimidation and harassment by officials along the common borders'.[31] On 28 February 2017, Mr. Obinna Orgazi, an entrepreneur and philanthropist, tearfully narrated his ordeal at the hands of border security personnel at the Togo-Ghana border on his way to Ghana. According to him:

> Among the uniform forces present to check travelers was Mr. Abdulaziz of the Ghana Narcotics Control Board (NCB), who is in charge of narcotics…. He reached for his mobile phone and made to take a photograph of my passport. I objected. To my surprise, he asked me to kneel down…. I refused to kneel down and demanded to know what crime I had committed. Believe me, the officer hit me severally and forced me down. He continued hitting me, amid my request for explanation. The harassment was quite baffling. I was still dumbstruck when my friend, a Ghanaian, arrived and tried to sort things out. The officer admonished him for speaking up for a Nigerian. After much deliberations with him in their native language, they extorted 100 cedes from him which I refunded my friend.[32]

Routine threats of arbitrary arrest and denial of passage if bribes are not paid are still common even though the ECOWAS policy on a common passport for the sub-region has been in place since 2005. 'Between Badagry (the entry point from Nigeria to Benin) and Noe (the entry point from Ghana to Cote d'Icoire)', writes Adebuyusi Adeniran, 'there are an estimated 120 border posts and security check points forcing individuals crossing these borders to switch intermittently from one official language to the other and exchange currencies several times across borders.[33] More than any other factor, the hindrances to free movement of persons, goods, services and labour coupled with the problem of inadequate cross-border infrastructure, pose a great threat to the growth of

[30] *The Nation,* 18 August 2011, 15.
[31] Adebuyusi Adeniran, *Regional Integration in the ECOWAS Region: Challenges and Opportunities*. *Backgrounder,* 19 (2012), 3.
[32] Mr Obinna Orgazi posted the incident on his facebook page on February 28, 2017.
[33] Adeniran, *Regional Integration in the ECOWAS Region*, 3.

intra-state commerce, tourism and overall development of the West African region.

Achievements of ECOWAS

ECOWAS has had many challenges in the forty one years of its existence. But these have not stopped the Community from taking some commendable steps in fostering unity among its member states. The Community is celebrated within and outside Africa as the most innovative and advanced among the continent's regional economic communities, particularly in the area of conflict prevention, management and peacekeeping. The ECOWAS Standby Force or ECOMOG is held as a model for other regional economic communities (RECs) in the continent. As Sheila Page and Sanoussi Bilal note, the role of ECOMOG gives ECOWAS a security element. The ECOMOG initiative is the clearest indication of the political commitment to a regional approach.[34] Because of the role of ECOMOG in the region, there have been no major skirmishes between ECOWAS states since the violent clashes between Mali and Burkina Faso in the mid 1980s.[35]

Again, the Community's Secretariat was recently transformed into the ECOWAS Commission with a strengthened mandate of furthering the cause of integration in the region. This was followed by the adoption, in June 2010, of a new Vision 2020: From an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of People; and more recently, a Regional Strategic Plan. Both programmes seek to give new impetus to the integration process in the region. It is undoubtedly true that many programmes drawn by ECOWAS have remained unaccomplished over the years. But its ability to adopt new strategies to hasten the actualization of its vision is indeed, a right step in the right direction. Among other things, it is an indication of the continued zeal of the Community to press for regional integration and overall development in the region.

Further, ECOWAS has made significant progress in resolving longstanding conflicts and has remained proactive in preventing new tensions from blossoming into full-scale conflicts. To this end, the Commission enacted the protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. This, according to Sesay and Omotosho, has significantly contributed to the deepening of democracy and good governance in member states through convergence and zero tolerance for changes in government through undemocratic means. In keeping with these protocols, ECOWAS, in alignment with the AU's action, suspended Guinea, Niger and Cote d'Ivoire following coups and repression of dissent in those countries. Consequently, Guinea held democratic elections at the end of 2010 and has since been reintegrated into both bodies.[36] Quite recently, also, the

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[34] Sheila Page and Sanoussi Bilal, *Regional Integration in Western Africa* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2001), 4.

[35] Sesay and Omotosho, 'The Politics of Regional Integration', 8.

[36] African Development Bank, *Regional Integration Strategic Paper*, March, 2011, 3.

Community brought its weight to bear on the former President of The Gambia, Yahya Jammeh when the latter refused to accept defeat at the December 1, 2016 Presidential election in the country which was won by Adama Barrow. A combined ECOWAS force of Nigerian, Senegalese, Malian and Ghanaian troops seized the capital, Banjul, as the sit-tight ruler, Jammeh, was forced to flee into exile in Equitorial Guinea in a private plane reportedly provided by Bola Ahmed Tinubu of Nigeria.[37]

It is also pertinent to point out that despite the inherent complexities in land travels between member states, the movement of people in West Africa is relatively more permissive than in other regions of the continent. According to the African Development Bank (ADB) 2011 Strategic Paper for West Africa, 'this is due in part, to the adoption of rules encouraging free movement of people, issuance of ECOWAS passport, etc., and in part, to historical and cultural factors'.[38] We may not have enumerated every achievement made by ECOWAS here but we argue that the Community to a considerable extent, reinforces the sense of unity and solidarity among its members, promotes democratic rule, averts conflicts in member states and represents a symbol of African consciousness.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Regional integration in West Africa is a necessity, not a choice. The region's colonial and post-colonial experiences in terms of economic, technological, political and social development clearly show that without a strong, purposive and effective regional integration mechanism, West Africa would remain in the backwaters of overall development. Forty one years of ECOWAS operation has recorded a number of commendable strides aimed at alleviating the suffering of the overwhelming masses. But the odds far outweigh the progress. Thus, any drive toward fulfilling the ECOWAS dream of a united, strong and economically viable West Africa must take special cognizance of these three factors; adherence to democratic principles by member states, restructuring of intra-regional trade relations and collective commitment to technological development.

No tourist or business person wants to risk his life in a region overrun by political crises. Sadly, politics in most states of the region including Nigeria which poses as the big brother of the union, is characterized by hate, intolerance for opposition and outright violence. Election periods witness incidences of brutal killings and open confrontations between rival political parties. The ugly trend is endemic in Nigeria and does not portray the country and indeed the region in good light. Democracy must, therefore, be made a rule and a basic requirement for membership of any regional group in West Africa with especial

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[37] Joseph Jibueze, 'Tinubu's Private Plane Flies Jammeh into Exile', *The Nation*, 23 January, 2017, 1,6.

[38] African Development Bank, *Regional Integration Strategic Paper*, 3.

regard to ECOWAS. There must be a convergence of democratization and the promotion of human rights as cardinal principles underpinning integration, if its progress is to gather pace.[39] What this entails is that before the Community can justifiably instill democratic ideals in members, there has to be, first, a commitment by individual countries to lead the campaign at the national level. Africa generally, has recorded little success in regional integration because its leaders erroneously hoped to achieve at the continental level, what they had failed to achieve at the domestic level. The question of endemic corruption, money laundering, bribery and all forms of misconduct in public spaces create unwholesome environment for business growth and tourist interest. ECOWAS must emphasize strict adherence to democratic principles and draw up strict punitive measures against corrupt leaders and those who sympathize with them.

Second, emphasis should be placed on increasing the volume and value of intra-regional trade and other exchanges. A high level of macro-economic convergence in the integrating economies including stabilizing cross-regional exchange rates, achieving intra-regional convertibility and establishing common regional currencies are some of the steps that need to be taken in the building a viable regional integration mechanism in West Africa[40], as elsewhere in the continent. While we cannot rule out the need for external trade to flourish, the region should as well, work to boost its export commodity and improve the level of domestic trade. Bold economic reforms at the domestic level aimed at creating the right climate for investment is a good place to start. This, however, must be preceded by a stable national economy. The prevalent economic recession in Nigeria is not only disheartening, but quite discouraging for business growth, foreign direct investment (FDI) and tourism.

States should, thus, embrace measures aimed at developing human capital and increasing domestic savings. These, among other factors, are instrumental to the unprecedented growth of the economies of Asia's newly industrializing countries such as China, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc. West Africa should rethink its economic models and redirect them towards achieving continental and global relevance in the economic sphere. Encouraging private sector participation, developing human capital through unhindered access to quality education, entrepreneurial trainings, infrastructural development and availability of a healthy political climate will go a long way in enhancing local and regional economic development. This is vital at the moment because the underlying political values and economic systems still prevailing in West African states do not live up to the demands of modern economic system.

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[39] Qobo, *The Challenges of Globalization in Africa*, 8.
[40] Qobo, *The Challenges of Globalization in Africa*, 12.

Finally, ECOWAS should stress a collective commitment among members, towards technological development of the region. Improving the region's technological status is important to improving the value and volume of intra-regional exchanges and enhancing the level of global competiveness of the region. As we have emphasized in this work, the idea of industrializing through import-substitution is inherently faulty. The growth path of post-colonial West African elite mostly took the form of import-substitution industrialization. Predicated on substituting domestically produced goods for foreign imports and preserving foreign exchange, this growth strategy constrained the full development of productive forces in the region. What Africans got at the long run were weak, inefficient and uncompetitive economies with stunted private sectors. The development and sustenance of labour-intensive manufacturing capabilities is vital to promoting home-grown technologies and reducing the menace of unemployment in the region. Summed up, a viable regional integration is predicated upon three major pillars: domestic peace and security, political and civic commitment and macro-economic stability.

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